

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

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P 021614Z OCT 73

FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1285

C O N F I D E N T I A L LAGOS 7973

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINR, NI

SUBJECT: VICTORIA GOWON

REF: STATE 195250

VICTORIA GOWON NEE ZAKARI, WIFE OF GENERAL GOWON, WAS BORN AUGUST 22, 1946 IN ZARIA (PRESENTLY IN NORTH CENTRAL STATE) TO CHRISTIAN FAMILY OF TIV TRIBAL ORIGIN. FATHER IS RETIRED NORTHERN NIGERIAN CIVIL SERVANT. MRS GOWON IS REGISTERED NURSE, GRADUATE OF UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN TEACHING HOSPITAL, AND HAS MAINTAINED INTEREST IN NURSING. SHE HAS HAD THREE CHILDREN, ONE OF WHOM DIED WITHIN FEW WEEKS OF BIRTH; SURVIVING CHILDREN ARE SON IBRAHIM, AGED 4, AND DAUGHTER SARABU, AGED 1. ACTIVE AND WELL-TRAVELED WITHIN NIGERIA AND AFRICA, SHE HAS WELL UPHELD POSITION AS FIRST LADY. MRS GOWON IS GENERALLY APOLITICAL, THOUGH HER HUSBAND HAS USED HER ON RARE OCCASIONS AS INFORMAL FMG VOICE (IBADAN 0288, AUGUST 16, 1971). MRS GOWON GENERALLY CONSIDERED TO HAVE "GROWN" IN HER POSITION, BEGINNING AS TYPICAL PRODUCT OF RURAL NORTH AND DEVELOPING INTO ACCEPTABLE HOSTESS AND FIRST LADY. RETIRING BY NATURE, SHE SEES AS FEW FOREIGNERS AS POSSIBLE, STRUGGLING THROUGH MEETINGS WITH DEPARTING AMBASSADORS' WIVES, WHICH HAS BECOME INCREASINGLY AWKWARD BECAUSE SHE HAS NEVER RECEIVED THEM IN FIRST PLACE. THIS TENDCY AVOID RESIDENT FOREIGNERS IN DIPLOMATIC AND BUSINESS COMMUNITY BECAME MORE PRONOUNCED AFTER DEATH HER SECOND CHILD. MANY NIGERIAN WOMEN CATTILY COMMENT ON FIRST LADY'S LACK OF DRESS STYLE, WHICH HAS IMPROVED MARKEDLY, HOWEVER, AND WAS SUBJECT DECIDEDLY FAVORABLE COMMENT DURING JUNE TRIP TO UK. ALL IN ALL, MRS GOWON

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DECIDEDLY LESS APPROACHABLE THAN HER GREGARIOUS HUSBAND. RECEIVES

CONSIDERABLE LOCAL RESPECT BUT PRIMARILY BECAUSE OF POSITION RATHER
THAN PERSONALITY. MOST PERSONS WHM SHE MEETS MUST EXPECT CARRY
CONVERSATIONS AND NOT TO STRAY TOO FAR FROM ORDINARY SUBJECTS.
REINHARDT

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